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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2184
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 1764
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 6599
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000678

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017

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SUBJECT: ON THE EVE OF ALGERIA'S ELECTIONS: WILL THEY VOTE?

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford, reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) The period of free media access for political parties qualified to participate in the May 17 national parliamentary elections has ended. On the eve of the elections, media reports indicated that two bombs (one carried out by a suicide bomber) exploded in Constantine on May 16, killing one police officer. Security in major Algerian cities is tight in an all-out effort to make the balloting go smoothly and encourage high voter participation.

MFA Deputy Director for the Americas Mourad Adjabi told PolEc Chief May 16 that he was a member of an MFA committee that would work all weekend (May 17-18) to ensure that the votes of Algerians abroad were properly counted. In mentioning his role, Adjabi noted that there was widespread concern in the government of Algeria that voter turnout in general for the elections would be poor.

¶2. (C) Adjabi's admission tracks completely with what we are hearing from Algerians. Businessman attending an embassy reception May 15 believed the elections would change nothing and voiced the opinion that turnout would be low. Three prominent Algerian journalists writing about the political beat told Ambassador and PAO on May 16 that they anticipated turnout would be relatively low. One journalist, from el Watan, commented that the public understands the parliament has little power and thus few people are interested in the elections. A journalist from best-selling el Khabar commented that the May 17 elections would change nothing and not affect the balance of power among the competing factions, both civilian and military, inside the government. A journalist from Quotidien d'Oran told us to think less about the legislative elections and more about the succession to Bouteflika, given the President's apparent ill health. Already, she claimed, many senior government leaders are focused on that question. All three journalists agreed that there is a widespread sentiment that the establishment parties will win easily and that sentiment in turn is likely to drive down turnout at the polls.

¶3. (C) Political party insiders tell us they fear that turnout will fall below 50 percent in the most populated areas of the country. These same sources noted that turnout was expected to be high in less populated areas where the social stigma of not voting was more pronounced. Since such areas historically vote for the FLN, political party representatives of other parties told us high voter mobilization in urban population centers was crucial to

their parties' chances. The Rally for Culture and Democracy Party and Workers' Party are two opposition parties, according to their spokespersons, whose fortunes rest on the turnout of discontented voters in urban areas. A political operative for the National Rally for Democracy Party (RND) said RND's primary concern was that voters who wanted change had given up on the political process' ability to deliver it and, hence, would stay home.

14. (C) The major political parties have provided post with a list of polling stations that are key to their get-out-the vote efforts. We plan to monitor those sites on election day in an effort to ascertain the extent of Algerian turnout and compare our observations with the data that political parties have promised to supply us throughout the balloting. The preliminary results of the balloting are likely to be released at 1700 EDT May 17, (2200 local time) when Interior Minister Zerhouni is scheduled to address the media. Post plans to report the overall results, as reported by the media, May 18. Official results, as certified by the National Council, are not expected before May 20 at the earliest.

FORD